

U.S. marshals capture suspected sex offender

By Matthew Hill/Register-Herald Reporter

"You can run, but you can't hide."

That's how Raleigh County Sheriff Danny Moore summed up the stunning arrest Wednesday of James Gordon Jennings in Winston-Salem, N.C. The capture of Jennings, wanted on 25 sex-related charges, was a collaborated effort between the sheriff's office and U.S. marshals.

"A tip came to our office over the telephone," sheriff's Detective J.C. Canaday said. "We received information on the address, and after investigating it further, we discovered that Jennings was living in the Winston-Salem area."

Canaday went on to explain how Jennings, when asked about his identity by U.S. marshals, gave an alias. When they explained to him the added federal charges he would face if he lied, he identified himself as the suspect and was arrested without incident.

"He waived extradition and was brought back to Raleigh County Thursday morning. Right now, he's at Southern Regional Jail awaiting a preliminary bond hearing," Canaday said.

Jennings faces sex-related charges dating back to the mid-1980s, Canaday explained.

"There are children and grandchildren of the suspect involved in this. We took this case very seriously because the suspect had made threats against the victims. Some of them have even had nightmares about him coming back."

Jennings had even altered his appearance by coloring and growing his hair, and shaving his beard, Canaday said.

Jennings was scheduled to be arraigned on sex-related charges earlier last month. He never showed up, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. The 50-year-old Ghent resident was last seen in the area on Sept. 27.

Canaday and Moore agreed on the indispensability of the U.S. marshals' assistance in capturing Jennings.

"The marshals brought the weight of the U.S. government to bear on Jennings. Over the past month, they proved their reputation. I can't stress enough the support we got from them. They were terrific to work with," Canaday said.

Sheriff's deputies contacted the U.S. Marshals Service two weeks into the search for Jennings. Moore said his staff-strapped department needed the help and the marshals came through.

"I have several men in Iraq right now, and one has been placed on alert. There are only three detectives on staff. It helps that we got this assistance because the other cases still have to be worked by someone," Moore said.

Marshals Chris Lair and Bettina Hitt aided sheriff's deputies as part of a collaborative effort known as the U.S. Marshals Joint Fugitive Task Force for Southern West Virginia. "There are 18 law enforcement agencies, state and local, involved in the task force now," Lair explained.

"We shared information and resources with them and vice versa," Canaday said. "Without them, I don't think we'd have found him as quickly, or in the same fashion, as we did. This relationship is key in the future."

-- E-mail:

mhill@register-herald.com